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SECURITY INFORMATION

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Security Officer, CIA

Public Relations Policy for CIA

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1. I couldn't agree with you more on many of the points you develop in your study of a Public Relations Policy for the Central Intelligence Agency. I am not entirely in accord with others. But for a Security Officer to attempt a rhetorical exchange with a public relations expert whose forte is the written word would certainly be the height of folly. So I will limit myself to a few pertinent comments on this question of a "silent service" vs a "not-so-silent service".

2. Your sections on "Internal Public Relations" and "InterAgency Public Relations" are particularly apropos and timely. To these I would add a paragraph entitled "Public Relations and the Smear". You have seen such comments as these appearing in the press: the young socialite CIA agents; the socialites in CIA; the Ivy Leaguers in CIA; CIA as the haven for misfits; non-socialites snowdrifting General Smith with resignations; the CIA loaded with Commies, etc. The application of public relations techniques to offset such publicity would appear to me to be one of the primary tasks of the public relations office.

3. I would like to comment on this statement appearing in your paper and the general theme to emphasize the overt side of intelligence: "The sooner we acknowledge that the overt activities of intelligence are normal everyday functions that a government must exercise if it is to exist, the sooner people will accept intelligence as a routine part of the policy-making processes of government." You yourself on an occasion when we wanted to eliminate a "cloak and dagger" reference from an article said that articles which sell are not those emphasizing the overt side of intelligence. Stories on espionage, I am sure, would go much better than handouts rehashing the National Security Act of 1947 and the coordinating and overt functions of CIA. In other words, the staid side of our face will gradually disappear and the glamorous espionage side emerge.

4. It has been said that CIA will be remembered more as a result of one bad mistake than a hundred good deeds. It is also a truism that the creation of a poor security atmosphere as a result of too much publicity will do more to wreck our reputation than all the preventive work done so far or which could be done by public relations. For, as one well known correspondent wrote on 2 December 1951, "The secrecy surrounding this Agency has never been equaled by any other Government office and most Washington officials concede that if a spy system isn't secret, its of no value." The tenor of our Government and of our people from the President on down is to emphasize security.

(Underlining added)

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5. The dilemma is this: Public Relations must constantly feed the press additional bits and pieces of intelligence. Newspapermen will not accept old stuff nor a rehash of trite material. These bits and pieces eventually result in an accurate picture of what the Agency does or, more important, hasn't been able to do. And shortly, the picture is almost complete. To paraphrase the Chinese saying, the picture is the result of a thousand words.

6. While we should not be bound by the experience of other intelligence agencies unless it is beneficial to us, the experience of the French and British intelligence organizations should not be ignored. Neither has permitted any publicity about its activities. Conditions in the three countries are not so different that this tradition should be overlooked in our analysis of a public relations policy for CIA.

7. I have no objections whatsoever to your recommendations and look forward to an adhoc committee review of this problem. I don't think it would add anything to expand my comments in this memorandum to a treatise on security vis-a-vis public relations.

Encl:  
TS-62763

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